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SUBJECT: SOMALIA: 2005 COUNTRY REPORTS ON TERRORISM

1. Post provides the text below as our submission to subject report. Embassy Nairobi POC is Somalia Watcher Michael Zorick, email: zorickmp@state.gov.

2. BEGIN TEXT:

Somalia

Somalia's lack of a functioning central government, protracted state of violent instability, long unguarded coastline, porous borders, and proximity to the Arabian Peninsula make it a potential location for international terrorists seeking a transit or launching point to conduct operations elsewhere. Regional efforts to bring about a national reconciliation and establish peace and stability in Somalia are ongoing. Although the ability of Somali local and regional authorities to carry out counterterrorism activities is constrained, some have taken limited actions in this direction.

Somalia is awash with Islamist groups engaged in a broad range of activities, making identification of terrorist organizations an art rather than a science. Movements such as Harakat al-Islah (al-Islah), Ahlu Sunna wal Jamaa (ASWJ), and Majma Ulimadda Islaamka ee Soomaaliya (Majma') seek power by political rather than violent means and pursue political action over missionary or charity work. Missionary Islamists such as followers of the Tablighi sect and the New Salafis generally renounce explicit political activism. Other Islamist organizations have become providers of basic health, education, and commercial services, and are perceived by some as pursuing a strategy to take political power.

Members of the Somalia-based al-Ittihad al-Islami (AIAI) have committed terrorist acts in the past, primarily in Ethiopia. AIAI rose to prominence in the early 1990s with a goal of creating a pan-Somali Islamic state in the Horn of Africa. In recent years, the existence of a coherent entity operating as AIAI has become difficult to prove. At the minimum, AIAI is now highly factionalized and diffuse, and its membership is difficult to define. Some elements associated with the former AIAI may continue to pose a threat to countries and Western interests in the region.

Other shadowy groups have appeared in Somalia that are suspected to have committed terrorist acts against Western interests in the region, or to be capable of doing so. Very little is known about movements such as al-Takfir wal-Hijra ("al-Takfir"), but the extremist ideology and the violent character of takfiri groups elsewhere suggests that the movement merits close monitoring.

Individuals and groups with past AIAI association and/or current takfiri leanings may be targeting Western interests in the region. Some among these are sympathetic to and maintain ties with al-Qaida. However, individuals and entities with former AIAI connections are also found in all of the political, missionary, and humanitarian organizations noted above.

END TEXT

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